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The *est* Standard Training¹

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Abstract. The format of the *est* standard training is described. Relationships which participants develop in the training are: to the trainer, to the group, and to self. Three aspects of self are presented: self as concept, self as experience and self as self. Relation of these three aspects of self to the epistemology of *est* are discussed, as are the experiences of aliveness and responsibility.

Introduction

Since fundamentally, *est* is a context in which to hold one's experience, I want to begin this essay by thanking a number of people for providing me with a context in which to write it. To begin, I want to thank those who attended the panel discussion at the APA meetings in May 1976, and, in addition, I want to thank the reader for this opportunity to discuss the *est* Standard Training.

In the paragraphs that follow, I will present some information which may be useful as a context in which to examine *est* as an example of an 'awareness training' in relation to contemporary psychiatry. I want to say at the outset that I am not qualified to write about large scale awareness trainings in general, and I will not presume to tell you anything about psychiatry. What I want to do is share with you some of the format, intended results, and 'theory' of *est* as an example of a large-scale awareness training.

¹ Portions of the material contained in this essay were originally presented at a panel discussion on 'Psychiatry and Awareness Training in Large Groups' at the 129th Annual Convention of The American Psychiatric Association in Miami on May 13, 1976.

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My intention is to provide a context in which the reader can have something of an experience of *est* and to create an opportunity for the reader, not simply to have some new concepts but to have an experience of what *est* is, insofar as that is possible in an essay.

So, I want the reader to know that my ultimate purpose is not to tell you some facts you did not know. I do ask you to entertain the possibility that there is something you *do* know, which you have not been aware that you know. The *est* training is an opportunity to become aware that you know things you did not know you knew, so it is not a 'training' in the usual 'rule-learning' sense of the word, nor is it an ingraining, by repetition or any other means, of behaviors, attitudes or beliefs.

Fundamentally, then the *est* training is an occasion in which participants have an experience, uniquely their own, in a situation which enables and encourages them to do that fully and responsibly.

I am suggesting that the best way to learn about *est* is to look into yourself, because whatever *est* is about is in your self. There are some who think that I have discovered something that other people ought to know. That is not so. What I have discovered is that people know things that they do not know that they know, the knowing of which can nurture them and satisfy them and allow them to experience an expanded sense of aliveness in their lives. The training is an occasion for them to have that experience — to get in touch with what they actually already know but are not really aware of.

Format

The *est* Standard Training is designed to be approximately 60 h long. It is usually done on two successive weekends — two Saturdays and two Sundays — beginning at 9 a.m. and going until around midnight. Sometimes a day's session takes longer, sometimes a little less, since the sessions go until the results for that day are produced.

There are breaks about every 4 h for people to go to the bathroom, have a cigarette, talk, or do whatever they like. In addition, there is one break for a meal during the day. People usually eat breakfast before and dinner after if they are less tired than hungry. We have altered these times on occasion to adapt, for instance, to institutional schedules. The same results have been produced doing the training over ten weekday evening sessions of 6 h each with a break in the middle of each session, and over three consecutive weekend sessions of 10 h each with three breaks including a meal break. The point is there is nothing in the duration of the training that is intrinsic to the training.

Included in the tuition (now \$ 300.00), in addition to the two weekends, are three optional seminars, called the pre-training, the mid-training, and the post-training seminars. These are approximately 3 h long, and are conducted in

the evenings a few days before, between and a few days after the weekend training sessions.

The training is held for about 250 people at a time, who are seated on chairs, arranged theater style, in a hotel ballroom. The trainer stands on a low platform in the front of the room so that the trainer can see and be seen by everyone. There are support personnel who sit in the back of the room, who manage the logistics of the training. For instance, they inform those participants on medication (who sit in the back row), when it is time to take it. There are microphones, to facilitate people who want to say something or ask a question, and everyone wears a nametag so that the trainer can address people by name.

Sometimes people wonder about what might be called the harshness of the training — why the rules are so unbending. It became very clear to me about 5 years ago that the rules in life do not bend. In other words, if I fall down, gravity does not say 'Well, we're going to relax the rules a bit since you hurt yourself'. I think that it is important for people who are being given an opportunity to discover themselves, to discover for themselves that there are stable environments, certain facts of living, they cannot 'con' or persuade into changing for them, no matter how pitiable they are, and no matter how intelligent and dominant they are. So the people who handle the supervision of the training — the room, the number of chairs, etc. — have been trained to be very consistent — to go by the book. The purpose of going by the book is not that we think you ought to go by the book all the time — that kind of rigidity in a person is obviously a mistake. It is to accentuate that the physical universe always goes by the book and that, like gravity, life does not relax the rules just because you want it to or even because you need it to. Gravity does not care, you see. It simply is. At the same time, the training is conducted with love and compassion (not sympathy and agreement) and anyone who completes the training is clear in their experience of this love and compassion. They know that their true power and dignity has been recognized from the very beginning of the training.

There are three relationships which develop during the course of the training which provide a framework for the material of the training.

One is a relationship with the trainer, who begins the training with what resembles a lecture, although trainees soon realize that it is not actually a lecture. To be sure, the trainer stands in front of the room talking, but he says things like 'If you experience something completely, it disappears', and since he says that early on in the training, almost everybody thinks that it is not true. Some people reinterpret it to mean something else *like* that, but not quite that, which could be true for them. In other words, people begin to develop a relationship to the trainer, who presents certain data about experiencing life, which trainees can examine to see if what he is saying is true for them in their experience. There may be a give and take between the participants and the trainer for a while until everyone is very clear what the trainer said. That does not mean

anyone has accepted it. In fact, people are effectively cautioned against merely believing anything presented in the training. It just means everyone knows that is what the trainer said, and everyone begins to develop his or her own unique relationship with the material the trainer presents, by seeing the unique relevance of what the trainer has to say to his or her own beliefs about and/or experience of living.

Another relationship which develops in the training is the trainee's relation to the group and to the individual members of the group. This develops out of an aspect of the training we call sharing, by which we simply mean telling others what is going on in the realm of your own experience. Initially, people raise their hands, one of the support people brings them a microphone, and they talk about something — be it an annoyance, or an insight, or their theory of the training, etc. Then, as the training goes on, people begin to share more fully what they are actually experiencing, until, toward the end of the training, people become able to share in a way we call 'getting off it' — relating things they have held on to perhaps for their entire lives — things they have been stuck with yet were unable to reveal they were holding onto, and now find they can let go of. About a quarter of the people in a given training share meaningful things of this sort. The rest either do not share or say conceptual kinds of things.

There is no confrontation from the group to a trainee or from the trainer to a trainee except in rare instances by the trainer. We ask trainees not to evaluate, judge or analyze each other's sharing, not to engage in a dialogue with each other, and on that basis to say whatever they have to say to the trainer, so that the training can occur within each individual's own experience, rather than in others' concepts or in the dynamics of the group. Those who choose to share, do so, and those who choose not to, find it is not required to realize the results of the training.

When people share, other trainees often find they can see their own story more vividly in someone else's experience than they can in their own. So a large part of the value people get in the training is the view they see of themselves in others' sharing.

The third relationship people experience in the training is an enhanced relationship to themselves, which in part, occurs during what we call processes. These are techniques in which people switch their attention from seeing their concepts about themselves, others and life, to observing directly their experience of themselves, others and life. This is done in an environment — or 'space' — that is safe enough for them to do that. That is, in a safe space, there is no expectation that you prove anything, or demonstrate anything, or keep up any appearances. In a safe space, whatever is so is not used to justify or explain or be consistent with a point of view. Processes are simply an occasion to look directly into one's experience and observe what's going on there, in safety.

For example, there is a process in which people are asked to select a prob-

lem from among those they have in life and to see specifically which experiences are associated with that problem — which body sensations in which specific locations in the body, which emotions or feelings, which attitudes, states of mind, mental states or points of view, which postures, ways of holding themselves, gestures, ways of moving, habitual actions and countenances, which thoughts, evaluations, judgements, things they have been told or read, conclusions, reasons, explanations and decisions, and which scenes from the past are associated with that problem. People discover remarkable things about their problems — for instance that there are body sensations felt when and only when that problem intrudes into their lives — a fact they had not noticed before.

Some processes last for 20 min, others for 90 min. People are usually seated during them, and afterwards they are invited to communicate whatever insights or awareness they had. In a very real sense, then, the trainees literally create the training for themselves.

People think there is *an est* training, when in fact, there is not. There are actually as many trainings going on in each training as there are individuals in the training, because people actually 'train' themselves, by handling on an individual basis those aspects of living that are common to all of our lives. Each part of the training becomes real for participants by virtue of experiencing themselves, not concepts derived from someone else's experience.

Thus, the training is not like a classroom in which the aim is to agree or disagree with a concept or a theory. In the training, we present spaces, or contexts, or opportunities, in a way that allows people to discover what their actual experience is. Participants in the training report and give evidence of obtaining value from getting beneath their concepts, their points of view, their unexamined assumptions, explanations, and justifications, to the actual experience of themselves, others and life.

To know oneself, as Socrates suggested, does not seem to provide the experience of satisfaction — of being whole and complete if one knows oneself in the same way as one knows about things. Thus one can know *about* love and not know love, just as one can know all the concepts of bicycle riding without having the experience or the ability to actually ride a bicycle. The training is about the experience of love, the ability to love and the ability to experience being loved, not the concept or story of it — and it is about the experience of happiness, and the ability to be happy and share happiness, not the concept, story or symbols of it. In short, the training is about who we *are*, not what we do, or what we have, or what we do not do or do not have. It is about the self as the self, not merely the story or symbols of self.

People often ask if the training is something one needs. The training is not something one needs. Now this statement is usually met, if not by surprise, then with outright disbelief. For, if the training is not something one needs, why should one do it.

The fact is, people usually come to introductory seminars when they see that their friends or family or associates who went to the training experienced a transformation or enlightenment which they themselves would like to experience. It is a natural part of the experience of transformation to share the opportunity to have the experience of transformation with others.

This becomes amusing after the people who had the hardest time understanding why their friends or loved ones were so excited and enthusiastic and eager for *them* to know about the training, finally do take the training, they then meet the same bewilderment in *their* friends and loved ones when *they* try to share it, because now *their* friends insist *they* do not need it either.

The fact is, no one *needs* the training. It is not medicine. If you are ill, you need medical attention. If you are mentally ill, you need therapy. The training is not medicine or therapy. If you are hungry, you need food. You need air. Actually you need someone to love and someone to love you. You need to feel some self-respect and the esteem of others. Without these, we do not function very well as human beings.

The training is none of these. It does not solve problems. It is true that some problems dissolve in the training, but not because it is the purpose of the training for people to work on their problems in the training. The training is not about people's problems *per se*.

What the training is about is related to those rare moments in life, which while rare, seem to come into everyone's life at some time or another. They are moments in which one is absolutely complete, whole, fulfilled — that is to say, satisfied. (I limit the word gratification to mean the filling of a need or desire, or the achievement of a goal. I use the word satisfaction to mean the experience of being complete.)

Each of us has experienced moments in our lives when we are fully alive — when we know — without thinking — that life is exactly as it is in this moment. In such moments, we have no wish for it to be different, or better, or more. We have no disappointment, no comparison with ideals, no sense that it is not what we worked for. We feel no protective or defensive urge — and have no desire to hold on — to store up — or to save. Such moments are perfect in themselves. We experience them as being complete.

We do not *need* to experience completion. People function successfully without such moments. Like the training, such moments are not something we 'should' have. Like the training, such moments do not make us any better. We are not smarter or sexier or more successful or richer or any more clever. These moments, these experiences of being complete, are sufficient unto themselves. Like the training, such moments are not even 'good' for you — like vitamins or exercise or things of that sort.

In the training, one finds there *is* something beyond that — the opportunity to discover that space within yourself where such moments originate, actually

where you and life originate. In the training, one experiences a transformation — a shift from being a character in the story of life to being the *space* in which the story occurs — the playwright creating the play, as it were, consciously, freely, and completely.

Because the experience of being complete is a state change from the rest of life, the questions and instruments we usually apply to measure life do not apply. We shall need to develop a whole new set of questions — a new paradigm to approach the experience of being complete.

In the training, the experience of being at the effect of life — of having been put here, and having to suffer the circumstances of life, of being the bearer or victim of life, or at best, of succeeding or winning out over the burdens of life — *shifts* to an experience of originating life the way it is — creating your experience *as* you live it — in a space uniquely your own.

In that space, the problems of life take on an entirely different significance. They literally pale, that is, become lighter — or enlightened. One sees, quite sharply, that *who* one is simply transcends and contextualizes the content with which one has been concerned. The living of life begins to be what counts, the zest or vivacity with which one lives, what matters.

It has been said that this is a polyanna view — that I think there's no pain and suffering in life. That is not my view at all. There is no doubt whatsoever in my experience and observation that people do suffer, that there is pain in life. If we were to sit quietly in an empty room for a few minutes looking at what we do and how we live, and at how much time we spend doing things that we pretend are important to us, most of us would find that we spend more time pretending not to suffer than in creating the experience of our lives.

In my observation of life, I find that during most of the time we are interacting with others, we are pretending, and we get so proficient at pretending that we eventually no longer even notice that we are pretending. We become 'unconscious' of pretending. We forget that the actual experience of loving someone — in contrast to the pretense or concept of loving someone, or the 'act' or drama of loving someone — leaves one absolutely high, vivacious, and alive.

Yet, each of us behaves as if we were really three people. First, there is the one we pretend to be. No one escapes this. Every one of us has an act — a front — a facade — a mask we wear in the world that tells the world who we are pretending to be. We think we need this to get along in life and be successful.

Underneath that mask is the person we are afraid we are — the person who thinks those small, nasty, brutish thoughts we try to hide, because we think we are the only one who thinks them, until we are willing to accept that we do actually think them, and only *then* notice everyone else does too. Until we confront our own smallness, we do not experience our real size. The truth is, we can only be as high as we can confront and take responsibility for being low.

I am suggesting that it is useful from time to time to get in touch with why

it is we have to be intelligent or successful or wonderful or kind. I am suggesting that when we look underneath the facade we present, we will find a cluster of thoughts, emotions, attitudes, etc. which are the exact opposite to what we have presented. All of us who are given credit for being intelligent have feelings, thoughts, etc. of stupidity and ignorance. All of us who are given credit for being wonderful have doubts. In my observation (which includes a fairly intimate interaction with over 90,000 people) we *all* have doubts about the authenticity of the way we present ourselves in the world.

Some people find this idea annoying. If you have spent your whole life proving you are not a fool, it is annoying to be called a fool. (A fool is one caught in his own pretense.) We are all very careful not to make fools of ourselves or not be fooled. Many see it as the ultimate disgrace. Only a fool pretending not to be a fool would be afraid of making a fool of himself. A fool presenting himself as a fool would have no problem with it, just as one who knows he is not a fool would have no problem making a fool of himself. Similarly, a man secure in his masculinity has no problem expressing feminine qualities. Each time we try to prove we are not fools we reinforce the belief that we must prove that we are not.

Underneath these two 'selves' — the 'front' and the 'hidden' — is the one we really are — under the one we work at being, the one we try to be, the one we are pretending to be, and underneath the one we do not want to be, the one we are avoiding being, and the one we fear we are. The extent to which we can allow ourselves to confront — to experience and be responsible for — the pretense and trying, the avoidance and fear, is the extent to which we can be who we really are.

The experience of being yourself *is* innately satisfying. If who you really are does not give you the experience of health, happiness, love and full self-expression — or 'aliveness' — then that is not who you really are. When you experience yourself *as* yourself, that experience is innately satisfying. The experience of the self as the self *is* the experience of satisfaction. Nothing more, nothing less.

Satisfaction is not 'out there'. It cannot be brought *in*. You will never *get* satisfied. It cannot be done. When you want more and different or better, that is gratification, and while that is gratifying, we always want even more or even better. Satisfaction is completion, being complete — what has been called 'the peace that passeth all understanding'. It is a condition of well-being — a sense of wholeness and of being complete *right now* — a *context* of certainty that right now is completely all right *as* right now and that the next moment will similarly *be*, fully itself. Not a judgment of good or bad, right or wrong, just what is.

I do not refer to smugness or to naivete, or to a preoccupation with self achieved by shutting out the world. I do not mean narcissism. I refer to the quality of participation which generates enthusiasm in its performance and in its beholders. I refer to the kind of invigorating vitality that makes a difference in

the world. Most of those who explain what we ought to do in the world do not make a difference in the world.

To summarize what happens in the est training, then, I would say the following. It is a transformation — a contextual shift from a state in which the content in your life is organized around the attempt to get satisfied or to survive — to attain satisfaction — or to protect or hold on to what you have got — to an experience of *being* satisfied, right now, and organizing the content of your life as an expression, manifestation and sharing of the experience of being satisfied, of being whole and complete, now. One is aware of that part of oneself which experiences satisfaction — the self itself, whole, complete, and entire.

The natural state of the self *is* satisfaction.

You do not have to *get* there. You cannot get there. You have only to 'realize' your self, and, as you do, you *are* satisfied. Then it is *natural* and spontaneous to express that in life and share that opportunity with others.

This explains, I think, the fact that people from all walks of life take the training, so that, with the exception that the group of graduates includes a higher percentage than the average population of better educated people and therefore the group also includes a higher percentage than usual of professionals, they are representative of the community at large. I say 'explains' with tongue in cheek of course, for by now you will have perceived that the only quality one must have to 'get' the est training is *self*.

So everyone 'gets' it, that is, has an experience of self as self. A few 'resist' because they have patterns of resistance that they are now completing (rather than dramatizing or reinforcing) as a part of expressing their being complete. Some do not 'like' it, others delay their acceptance, both also patterns now to be completed. Even these, in my experience, have it, and are covering it over, for a while, with considerations, explanations, or other contents which they are completing.

This is not a matter of concern to us, since the principal intended result of the *est* training is a shift in the person's relationship to their system of knowing contents, or technically a shift in their epistemology. Thus, the contents of people's lives are not worked on *per se* during the training, since it is not the purpose of the training to alter the circumstances of lives or to alter peoples' attitudes or point(s) of view about the circumstances of their lives. It is the purpose of the training to allow people to see that the circumstances of their lives and that their attitudes about the circumstances of their lives exist in a context or a system of knowing, and that it is possible to have exactly the same circumstances and attitudes about these circumstances held in a different context, and that, as a matter of fact, it is possible for people to choose their own context for the contents of their lives. People come out of the training 'knowing' that in a new way. Now I mean something larger than 'knowing' or understanding. I mean that people experience being empowered or enabled in that respect.

They no longer *are* their point of view. They *have* one, and know that the one they have is the one they chose, until now, and that they can, and probably will, choose to create other points of view. They experience, that is, that they are the *one who* defines the point of view, and not the reverse. They experience the intended result of the training, which is a shift in what orients people's being from the attempt to *gain* satisfaction — a deficiency orientation — to the *expression* of satisfaction already being experienced — a sufficiency orientation.

This is so even for the experience of psychosis. In our research⁴, we have asked independent investigators to look very carefully at the issue of harm. And while I am not fully qualified to discuss the intricacies of research⁵, I can report that none of the research has shown any evidence that *est* produces harm. Now, although it has not proven that *est* does not harm, it is noteworthy that investigators asked to look carefully at this question have not found evidence of harm. Every indication we have suggests that there is a lower incidence of psychotic episodes either during the training or among the graduates after the training than in a comparable group.

Interestingly, those graduates of the training who have experienced psychotic episodes after the training, report that they experienced the episode in a different way after the training than when they had such episodes before the training. For example, in Honolulu, at the general hospital there, two of the people who had psychotic episodes were graduates, as were some of the hospital staff. The graduates who had psychotic episodes said that their experience of psychosis after the training differed from their experience of it before the training in that they had somehow gained the ability to complete their experience rather than manage it or control it, or suppress it. We could say that they seemed to move to mastery of the psychotic material rather than be the *effect* of it. So it would appear that the epistemological shift at the core of the *est* training is one which can be used to recontextualize even psychotic episodes, although they are so rare in our experience that this tentative generalization must be regarded as based on a very small sample. We are currently planning systematic controlled research on this and other issues.

The Epistemology of est

Properly speaking, *est* is not an epistemology, since epistemologies are ordinarily defined as ways of understanding the contents of experience, and *est* is not about understanding the contents of experience; it is about the source or

⁴ Two formal, although preliminary, studies, including follow-up.

⁵ cf. *Babbie's* discussion, this volume.

generation of experience. We enter here into a region of discourse laden with initially baffling paradoxes, since we are dealing now with understanding understanding, as it were, a task perhaps not unfamiliar to psychiatry.

What makes *est* not simply another discipline or epistemology, as far as I can tell, is what makes relativity and quantum mechanics different from the disciplines which preceded them and that is that the disciplines which preceded relativity and quantum mechanics derived from epistemologies based on the sensorium. What is very clear to me is that *est* is not based on the sensorium, so I employ relativity and quantum mechanics because I need examples of disciplines which do not derive from sense experience. There are facts in relativity which do not 'make sense' yet there is a logic in relativity which is as hard and certain as the epistemology of classical physics, without being based on sense data, although — in an expanded context — in accord with it, i.e., allowing and even giving insight into it.

And, just as it is actually impossible to hold the data of relativistic physics in a classical context, so it is simply impossible to hold the data of *est* in the context of classical epistemology. In other words, I am using words derived from a prior epistemology to describe a later epistemology that does not fit within the prior epistemology. This is why a good deal of what I have to say often sounds uncomfortably paradoxical, and in some views, 'foolish'.

I am saying that what is different about the epistemology of *est* is that it moves beyond the sensorium to a reality which, while allowing sense experience, is not confined within it. It is neither rational, in the usual conceptual meaning of that term, nor irrational, in the usual emotional or affective meaning of that term. It is a supra-rational epistemology, beyond both of these classical alternatives. Just as we cannot reduce a relativistic space into Cartesian coordinates of *x* and *y*, so I hold, we may not reduce the space from which epistemologies derive, the context of epistemologies — what I call self — into classical conceptions of self, the self as a thing or as a point or at best as a process.

I do not mean to be arrogant in citing Einstein as a case in point of paradoxes of this sort. I do so because he represents the most familiar example of someone who somehow managed to convey relativity to a world in which there was no basis for understanding it. He often referred to the fact that it is theory which tells us what to look for, and initially put forward his theory without benefit of experimental verification. Then, when we looked, we found that light rays *did* bend on their way around the sun. Somehow, he said what could not be said. Similarly, in the *est* training, we say things you cannot say and people get things you cannot tell them.

Now, this is not really as paradoxical as it sounds, because the truth is, although you cannot fit an expanded context into a contracted one, you can fit a contracted context into an expanded one. It is simply the case that most of us are very reluctant to come up with an expanded context for our experience,

because we think that it invalidates our previous limited context, and thus presents a threat to what we think our survival is based on. Now, *there* is a paradox worth reckoning with, since, in my view, it is precisely the expansion of limiting contexts which not only vouchsafes survival but generates those rare experiences I have referred to as moments of spontaneous transcendence, or transformation. I mean experiences of self – not self as concept, or self as peak experience (the experience of self *by* self) – but the direct and unmediated experience of self *as* self, not limited by previous context. Or, indeed, by *any* context.

There you have it. For most humans, self is positional – a location in time and space – a point of view which accumulates all previous experiences and points of view. You are there and I am here. During the training there is a shift in the way one defines oneself – not merely in the way you think about your definition of self – nor merely in the way you believe your self to be – but in the actual experience of who you are as the *one who* defines who you are, not the definition. As self, you are no longer a content – another thing in the context of things – but the context in which contexts of things occur. You become a space in which one of the things, one of the contents is your point of view about who you are. You *are* no longer that point of view. You *have* it, as *one* of the experiences *you* have. You experience you as the one who *is* experiencing you.

I know this is an unusual way to use the words self and experience, and since I have no intention to mystify, let us move towards a schematic that may be useful in illustrating what I mean.

There is the experience of self *as* self, the experience of self *by* self, and the experience of self as symbol or thing.

If I ask you to describe what you are experiencing *right now*, almost everyone who decides to go along at all, without considering whether it is possible, starts a process in which they try to articulate what they are experiencing. *That* we experience is axiomatically assumed by almost all of us all of the time. It is as though it were a given. (Back in the 'old days' people may have said something like, 'What I'm experiencing is that I don't like it in this room. It's terrible. The whole thing is awful. I just got up on the wrong side of the bed today and nothing is going to work out.' Today we know better than that. Today we are hip. We know to describe what we are experiencing in experiential terms, rather than in conceptual terms.) We might begin with a description of the perception of our senses; go on to describing our body sensation; emotions and feelings; attitudes; states of mind, 'mental states'; our fundamental approach to circumstances, and our way of looking at things, i.e., our point of view; we might describe our motion or movement, kinesthesia; and we might describe the actual thoughts we are thinking right now; and what we are imagining or remembering. Let us locate all of these components of experience within the square in figure 1.

The square itself represents the instant-by-instant nature of the experience

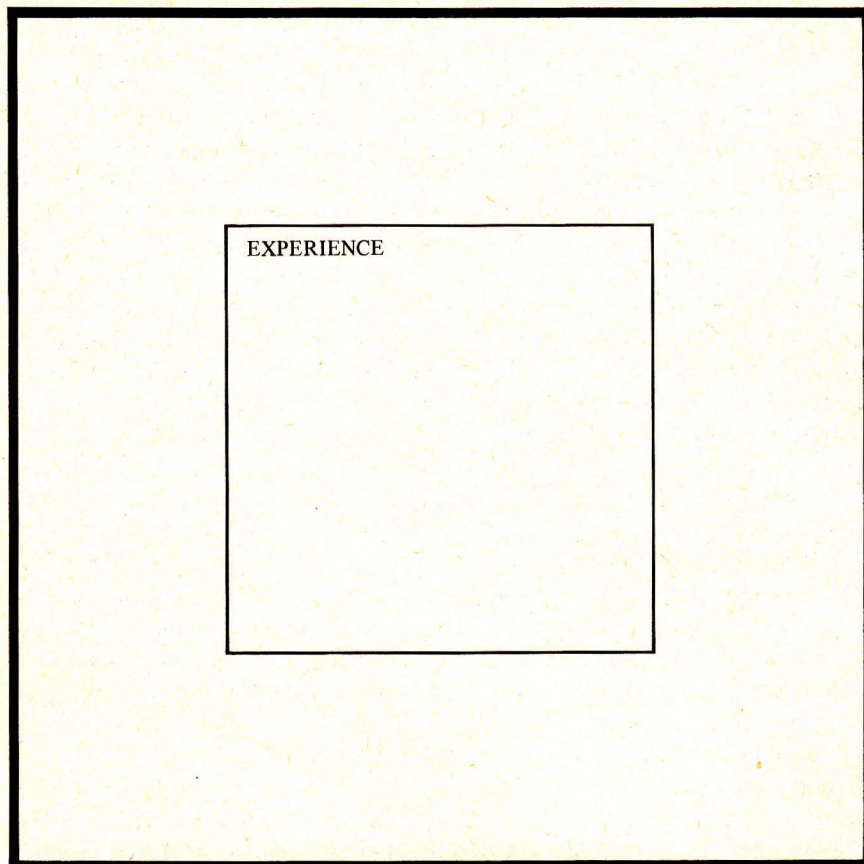
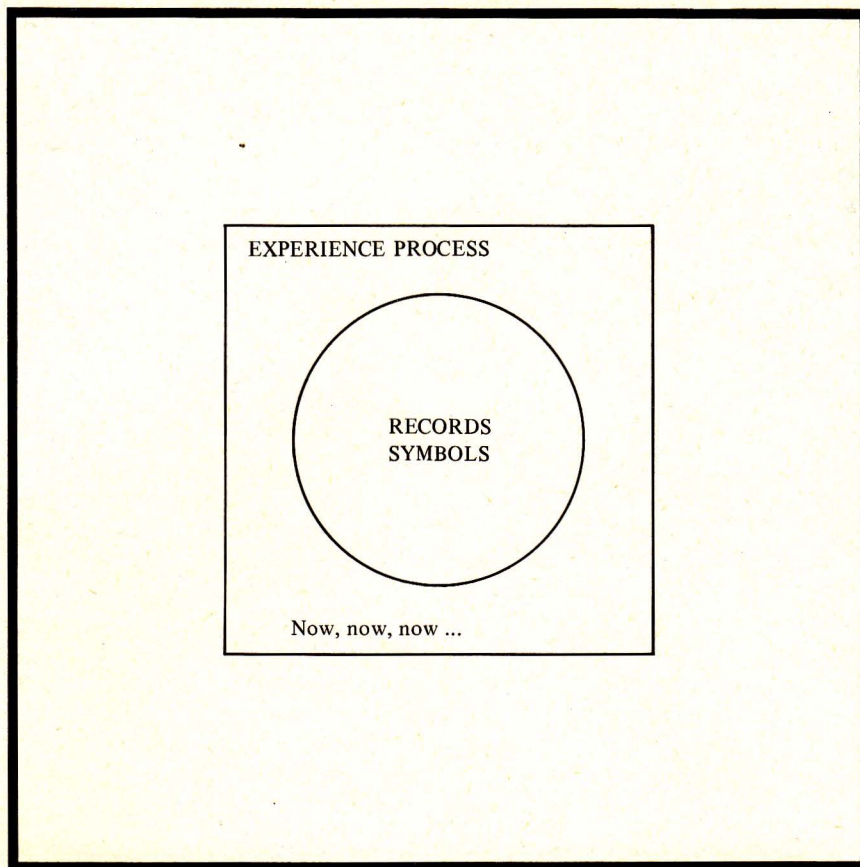


Fig. 1.

of life — not the process, or the accumulation of these instances. The square stands for *now*, and then *now*, and then *now*.

Of course, when I ask you to describe what you are experiencing right now, I have actually asked you to do the impossible. By the time you apprehend your experience — that is to say, when you stop to see or note what it is that you are experiencing, you are no longer denoting what you are experiencing *now*. You are, in fact, denoting what you experienced a moment ago. Actually, it is more elusive than that, because experience itself has no quality of persistence. In other words, what you experienced a moment ago is now gone *as experience*. What remains of what you experienced a moment ago is not experience but a *record* of what you did experience in *that* moment (commonly called memory). In other words, when you stop to formulate what it is you are experiencing so that

*Fig. 2.*

you can note it and think about it or realize it or describe it, it is not only not *now*, it is not even experience. It is, in fact, merely a record of what you experienced — a record consisting of a collection of symbols which you use to represent what you experienced. So the best you can hope to do when I ask you to describe or take note of what you are experiencing right *now* is to describe or take note of the symbols of what you experienced a moment ago. These records or symbols of experience are represented in figure 2 as a circle.

To review: The square represents the instant-by-instant process of living. It is for the most part unformulated until it is formulated as symbol in a manner dictated by our concepts and then retained as concepts. the square represents experience or process. The circle represents symbols and concepts. The function of the concepts (the circle) is to organize experience or process (the square). In

other words, the function of concepts is the organization of experience into meaningful patterns, then groups of patterns and the relationships of groups of patterns.

For example, if you were to see a ghost walking in front of you, you probably would not say, 'Terrific, my first ghost'. More likely, you would say, 'I must have eaten something strange for dinner', or 'Perhaps I have been hypnotized'. In other words, your mind's concepts will organize the raw experience — that is to say, formulate it (represent or symbolize it) so that it is consistent with your concepts. If it were not for this organizing ability, you would grope around your own room to discover the way out. As a matter of fact, without this organizing ability even the experience and the resultant idea that there was an *outside* of the room would occur only by accidently falling through the doorway each time you are in a room.

So in the circle we have the organizing principles of experience or the organizing principles of process or the organizing principles of what we generally call life. Conversationally, we use the word explaining rather than organizing, so conversationally, organizing principles become explanatory principles. Unfortunately, most of us make no distinction for ourselves between moment-by-moment experiencing and the concepts which are records and organizations of those experiences.

Our language even uses the same symbol (the word experience) for these entirely different phenomena. We say, 'I am *experiencing* talking to you' and 'I *remember the experience* of having talked to you'. What I really remember is the symbols and concept I used to record the experience of talking to you, and I use the same word for both of these.

What ordinarily happens is our concepts begin to determine what we experience. These concept-determined experiences (mechanicalized experiences) then reinforce the concepts from which they arose, which reinforced concepts further determine experience, and so on. In this conceptualized or mechanicalized condition of living, one is at best successful and at worst a failure or pathological.

As far as I can tell, when we said something was 'wrong' with people, what we have often attempted to do in our society was to get them to give up 'bad' concepts or take on 'good' concepts. In modern therapies, we now attempt to break the hold of concepts on experience so that people can be more directly aware of their experience and experience more directly.

I am suggesting a third possibility, beyond experience or process and beyond symbol or concept. The third possibility is represented in figure 3 by the space in which the square and circle are drawn on the page. In other words, it is the page itself. This *space* of the diagram represents what I call a generating principle — that which gives rise to experience, as distinguished from experience/process, or the organization/explanation of experience. It is the *source* or creation or generation of experience or process or, if you will, life. Rather than

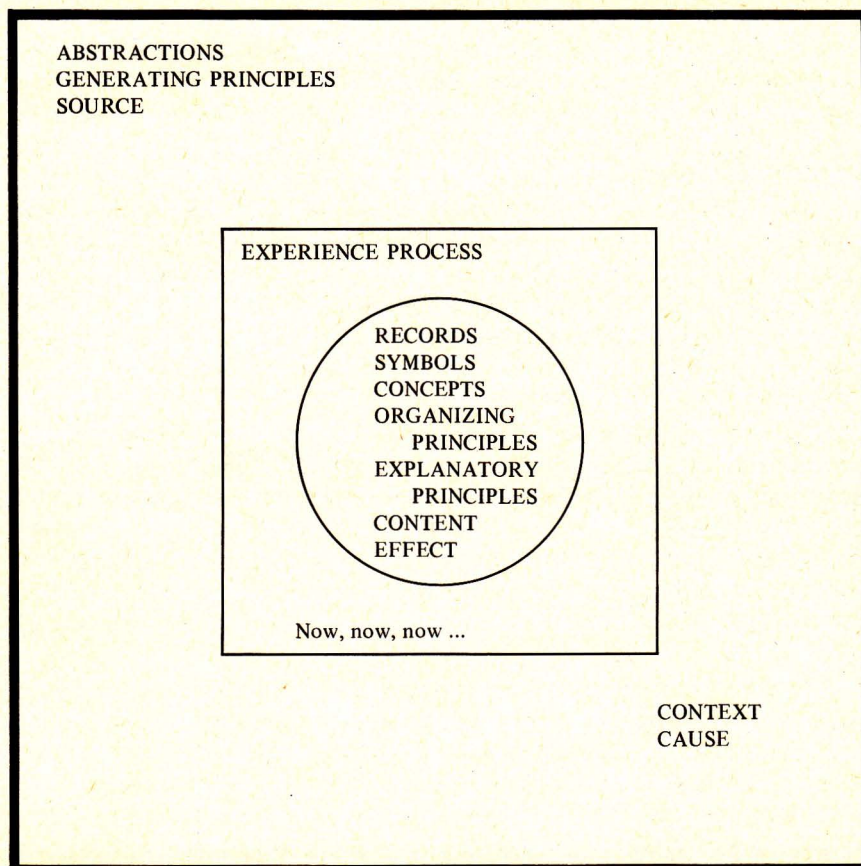


Fig. 3.

organizing or explaining, it generates or creates. And rather than being conceptual and symbolic, it is abstract.

In Zen, they say that those who know don't tell. What they may mean is that self as self (represented by the space of the diagram) generates experience, sources life. It does not explain it or 'organize' it. In Zen, they also say that those who tell don't know. What they mean is that self as symbol or thing (represented by the circle in the diagram) can explain it but cannot source or generate it. We all know people who can explain and rationalize their entire lives and everyone else's, for that matter, who do not generate real satisfaction, fulfillment or aliveness in life. At best they present a good facade.

Traditionally, the world is usually divided into two groups: people who experiential or intuitive or feeling or emotional or non-rational and the other

camp, people who are intellectual, verbal, conceptual and rational. I am suggesting a third possibility which requires a new paradigm of understanding and a logic, philosophy, language and syntax which are appropriate to it. To point in the direction of what I mean here, I use the analogy of relativity and quantum mechanics, which required physics to generate a new paradigm not understandable in the old classical paradigm, but which is a state change or, as I prefer to call it, a transformation. Relativity and quantum mechanics also require a new logic, philosophy, language and syntax of the *physicist*, which in the old logic, philosophy, language and syntax sound paradoxical and irrational – but once apprehended are seen to be fully logical, rational and consistent and even *allow* the old logic, philosophy, language and syntax – perhaps even illuminate it. This is not anti-intellectual or irrational or even non-rational. It is a kind of supra-rationality, a context *in* context.

The difficulty I have with the prevailing scientific epistemology is that it tends to move backwards – from *content* to context (from the circle to the square) which in my view forces us to locate the source of experience in the result of experience.

I suggest there is another way and that is, to come from the source of experience – which has a logic all in its own – *to* experience – which too has a logic – and move on to the symbolic record of experience – which also has a logic, or order all its own.

What we ordinarily call logic is actually a specialized logic which is consistent with a symbolized and conceptualized sense-perceived reality. It is the logic of content, object or thing – a logic of reality of parts. There is another, separate and distinct logic which is consistent with a process (experiential-here-and-now) based reality. It could be said that this logic is consistent with a sense-perceived reality which has not been symbolized and conceptualized. Actually, the reality with which this logic is consistent includes – in addition to sense perception – such items as body sensation, emotion, feeling, attitude, state of mind, movement, motion, kinesthetic, thought itself, imagination, and memory. An example of this is the logic of art, dance and music which, by the way, often appears illogical and irrational when seen from the logic of the symbolized and conceptualized sense-perceived reality. (It is a fundamental malady in our culture that as we become more enculturated we become more likely to try to make sense out of our experience-process with a logic of symbols and concepts.)

While the first of these two logics does not include the second, the second includes the first. That is, the second one is the context for the first one.

There is a third logic which is distinct and separate from the first and/or second of these two logics. It is even further removed from what we ordinarily call logic, and, as a matter of fact, it seems completely paradoxical, non-sensical and strange when viewed from the perspective or ordinary logics. It is a logic

which is consistent with a source-of-form rather than form — source-of-time rather than time — source-of-position rather than position-based reality. It is the logic of context and creation — a logic of a reality of wholes. It is a logic of universals, of ultimate contexts, which allows for process, change, experience, and particular sets of contents.

This logic system of self as self is not 'sensible'. It seems paradoxical, because it must speak a language based on a logic of the senses, in which the subject of the verb must be different from the object of the verb. Self as self does not 'make sense'.

Self as self is represented in figure 3 as the space or content of the diagram. The experience of self by self is represented by the square in the diagram. Self represented as symbol, or self experienced as an object or thing, is represented by the circle in the diagram. Self as self does not explain behavior, it generates it. Self as concept does not generate life — it only explains it. Generating principles generate and explaining principles explain.

This brings us to the final notion I want to present in this essay — the notion of responsibility. In ordinary discourse, I find the idea of responsibility almost totally buried under concepts of fault, guilt, shame, burden, and blame, so that a discussion of responsibility almost invariably elicits a defensive response, as if to say, 'it wasn't *my* fault', or a brave, 'I did it'.

And yet, the experience of responsibility for one's own experience is the awareness that I am the source of my experience. It is absolutely inseparable from the experience of satisfaction. Satisfaction is the natural concomitant of the experience of self as generating principle or abstraction or source or cause. Only if *I* love you do *I* love you, and if I am not responsible for (the source of) loving you — then 'obviously', *I* am not loving you. I might *have* love for you or *do* love for you but I *am* not loving you. Having or doing love can be gratifying, need-fulfilling, and cannot be satisfying, whole or complete.

Similarly, if *I* am not responsible for (the source of, the cause of) my experience of the predicaments in my life, then *I* can only resist, fix, change, give into, win out over, or dominate. Paradoxically, the experience of helplessness or dominance results from the attempt to locate responsibility outside of self and sets up a closed system out of which it is sometimes very difficult to extricate a valid experience of self; since the self which might otherwise be responsible has been excluded in the attempt to protect it from guilt, shame, blame, burden and fault.

I am sometimes asked whether I 'really' mean that people are wholly responsible for their experience of life, as if I wished to blame people in poor circumstances. For example, I am asked whether accident victims are 'responsible' for having accidents. I hope it has become clear in the context I have developed above that such questions might involve an oversimplification.

Responsibility, in my view, is simply the awareness that my universe of

experience is my own including the experiences of those events in my life I call accidents.

Responsibility begins with the willingness to acknowledge that my self is the source of my experience of my circumstances. And yet, on occasion, some people think that I think accidents do not happen — or would not happen, if I were 'really' responsible. I am sure you will understand my occasional dismay when I am asked questions of this sort. On reflection, I usually recall that such questions derive from a well-intentioned (though perhaps limited) view of human dignity, an intention with which I can align myself, since my own intention is precisely to show that the experience of responsibility is *enabling*, not *disabling*.

I have no interest in the justification of circumstances or producing guilt in others by assigning obligation. I am interested in providing an opportunity for people to experience mastery in the matter of their own lives and the experience of satisfaction, fulfillment, and aliveness. These are a function of the self as context rather than thing, the self as space rather than location or position, the self as cause rather than self at effect.

I am not saying that you or anyone else is responsible. True responsibility cannot be assigned from outside the self by someone else or as a conclusion or belief derived from a system of concepts. I do not say that you or anyone is responsible. I do say — with me, you have the space to experience yourself as responsible — as cause in the matter of your own life. I will interact with you from my experience that you are responsible — that you are cause in your own life and you can count on me for respect and support as I am clear that I am fully responsible for my experience of you, that is to say, from my experience of the way you are.

Ultimately, one experiences oneself as the space in which one is and others are. I call this the transformation of experience. At the level of source — or context — or abstraction — I am you. That is beyond responsibility.

In sum, I affirm that human experience is usually though not necessarily ensnared in a trap of its own devising, born of a wish to survive and remain innocent. And ironically, our stubborn wish to survive prompts us to rely on concepts of life built with records of past survivals, thus reducing self to victim, or at best to survivor or dominator, on which spectrum, every position is one of effect.